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*Publication date:*  
2013

*Document Version*  
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Goebel, Z. (2013). *The construction of semiotically dense stereotypes in Indonesian soaps*. (Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies; No. 83).

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# Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies

## Paper 83

### **The construction of semiotically dense stereotypes in Indonesian soaps**

by

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# **THE CONSTRUCTION OF SEMIOTICALLY DENSE STEREOTYPES IN INDONESIAN SOAPS<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

Ethnicity is now a ubiquitous social category in Indonesia, which is typically made up of a combination of person, place, and linguistic tokens which form light ethnic stereotypes. The representation of personas in audio-visual mediums, such as television, laminate these light ethnic stereotypes with viewable and hearable demeanors as well as interactional histories to produce semiotically denser ethnic stereotypes. Guided by Hymes' SPEAKING framework and inspired by a rich body of work on semiotics, television, and multimodal analysis, I explore how such representations can be analyzed. My empirical focus will be a comedic soap that was broadcast on Indonesian television in the mid-1990s.

## **1. Introduction**

Ethnicity is now a ubiquitous social category in Indonesia, which is typically made up of a combination of person, place, and linguistic form. While we now have a good picture of the genesis and reproduction of ethnic stereotypes, we are only starting to understand how television has figured in the reproduction of ethnic stereotypes and how audiovisual representations have contributed to the semiotic density of these stereotypes. Guided by Hymes' SPEAKING framework and inspired by a rich body of work on semiotics, television, and multimodal analysis here I expand my earlier work (Goebel, 2008, 2011a) by showing how light versions of ethnic stereotypes are reproduced and linked to particular demeanors and interactional histories to form semiotically denser models of personhood.

After offering a synthesis of some of the work on television, semiotics, and multimodal analysis I first offer a short history of the idea of ethnicity in Indonesia as a way of

contextualizing the representations which become the focus of my multimodal analysis. In my analysis I examine how the co-occurrence of specific linguistic tokens with signs of place, proxemics in interaction, embodied language (e.g. gesture, facial expressions, and prosody), topic (e.g. talking about the world versus talking about life worlds), and the extent to which speakers share common knowledge about locale or an “interactional history” all help produce dense models of ethnic personhood.

## **2. Constructing dense semiotic models: audio-visualizing demeanor and histories**

At least since Halls’ (2006 [1980]) work, the relationship between audio-visual mediums and stereotypes has received a lot of attention in cultural and media studies (for summaries of this work see Ang, 1996; Morley, 1986). As a ubiquitous medium that constructs and reproduces stereotypes through representations of language practice, audio-visual mediums have increasingly become the focus of sociolinguist and linguistic anthropological work (Bucholtz, 2011; Bucholtz & Lopez, 2011; Goebel, 2008, 2011a; Loven, 2008; Meek, 2006; Mendoza-Denton, 2011; Richardson, 2010). Putting aside the issue of reception (e.g. Ang, 1996; Rachmah, 2006; Spitulnik, 1993), audio-visual mediums continue to invite us to examine how stereotypes are constructed and reproduced in such mediums.

With reference to the work of Agha (2007) and Eisenlohr (2009), we can suggest that this medium is quite unique because of the simultaneous and rapid way in which it can present a series of signs. This form of presentation helps associate one sign with another, while providing indexical focus over time which helps to develop emergent social personas or stereotypes (Agha, 2007: 22-29). Typically, such representations “recontextualize” (Bauman & Briggs, 1990) a number of signs that are already recognizable emblems of identity, while laminating them with further signs to construct a “demeanor” (Goffman, 1967: 78), or a semiotically denser version of a stereotype. We can see this in action in television soaps and

other audio-visual story telling which need to draw heavily on these emblems of identity to rapidly establish character identities (Richardson, 2010), and then to develop or add semiotic density to these personas throughout the narrative by representing embodied interactions and the interactional histories of characters.

Understanding the development of this type of semiotic density requires methods drawn from scholarship on multimodal analysis (e.g. Goodwin, 2006; Haviland, 2004; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Norris, 2004; O'Toole, 1994; Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Van Leeuwen, 2005). Even so, for the task at hand their descriptive frameworks including their transcription methods seem to be either not detailed enough or too detailed. For example, some don't focus upon face-to-face interaction (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; O'Toole, 1994; Van Leeuwen, 2005), while others offer more descriptive means than are needed to make the points that I want to make here (Goodwin, 2006; Haviland, 2004; Norris, 2004). Thus, for the moment I draw upon these approaches, while being guided by Hymes' (1972, 1974) SPEAKING framework, which enables the type of frame by frame comparisons that I do in the following sections.

Understanding the development of semiotic density is also about understanding how a persona is developed into a believable character, who has a history of embodied interaction with others within a represented setting. Such interactional histories can be semiotically developed in a number of ways, including through the representation of different characters' who share common ground about setting. As another way of referring to interactional history, common ground can be seen as knowledge about referents in interaction that is jointly established as either shared or not among a participant constellation (Enfield, 2006; Hanks, 2006). Through the development of a credible character, stereotypes are not just laminated with embodied language, but also with a model of interactional history that has a semiotic fit with other represented emblems of identity.

### 3. The idea of ethnicity in Indonesia

Ethnicity is a ubiquitous category throughout Indonesia. Introductory textbooks and scholarly accounts of Indonesia and Indonesian (*bahasa Indonesia*) point out that Indonesia is made up of over 17000 islands populated by 400-1000 ethnic groups, each with their own language (e.g. Abas, 1987; Alisjahbana, 1976; Bertrand, 2003; Dardjowidjojo, 1998; Elson, 2008; Robson, 2004; Sneddon, 2003; Vickers, 2005). In daily interaction, strangers are commonly identified as a member of one ethnolinguistic group or another with reference to their accent along with a commonly asked question about where that stranger was born. In its light and easily recontextualizable form the idea of ethnicity is typically presupposed through a combination of place, and linguistic form which are regularly referred to as named regional languages in school curriculum, census documents, political discourse, and so on. Intimate social relations are also linked with co-ethnic interaction, while another named language – Indonesian, the national language – has indexical links with interactions among strangers and people from different ethnic groups.

The formation of ethnicity as a social category had its genesis in the work of Dutch missionaries, Dutch administrators, and later Dutch run schools (Errington, 2001; Moriyama, 2005). Typically, ethnicity was a category that anchored a language to a region and group of people living in that region. Since the 1800s the idea of ethnicity and its association with linguistic forms and region has been a constant feature of political, bureaucratic, and educational discussions and policy, helping to naturalize this ideology (Goebel, 2010, 2013). From 1966 onwards there was a large increase in the mechanisms that contributed to the naturalization of this ideology. In particular there was an increase in institutionally authorized one-to-many participation frameworks, especially schools and television programming (Bjork, 2005; Kitley, 2000; Sen & Hill, 2000; Soedijarto et al., 1980; Thee Kian Wie, 2002).

In the case of education, the number of primary school students in 1990 (24 million) was nearly three times that of 1960 (8 million), while the number of lower secondary school students increased from 1.9 million to over 5.5 million in this same period (Bjork, 2005: 54). During this period central and regional government departments attempted to deliver a number of languages in primary and secondary schools (e.g. Arps, 2010; Lowenberg, 1992; Nababan, 1985). These languages included the language of the region where the school was located (*bahasa daerah*), Indonesian, and English. While the success of these efforts was patchy (e.g. Kurniasih, 2007), the one-to-many participation framework of schooling helped to continue associations between linguistic forms, regions and people to reproduce ideas of ethnicity.

Just as importantly, regional ethnic social types continued to be the focus of citizenship type classes and part of the reason for the use of Indonesian as the language of education. As students went through school and university they were introduced to many of Indonesia's ethnic groups by reference to lessons about their housing architecture, dress, and folk tales, as well as other signs of region, such as car number plates, and monuments (Parker, 2002). Ideas about "otherness" and how to identify others of a different ethnicity were also found within the ideology behind the use of Indonesian as the language of education. Indonesian was not only represented in textbooks, grammars, and classrooms as the language of education and modernity, but its usage among Indonesians from throughout the archipelago was also ideologized as the penultimate "example of" and "vehicle for" interaction amongst strangers and for the doing of unity in diversity (e.g. Abas, 1987; Alisjahbana, 1976; Dardjowidjojo, 1998; Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1993; Nababan, 1985).

This process of institutionalizing a language of inter-ethnic communication, along with recognition and respect for other ethnic groups also came in the form of other one-to-many participation frameworks. For example, in 1978 public servants started to receive official

training about the need for inter-group and inter-region harmony (Elson, 2008: 248-249). In 1975 the mini-Indonesia ethnic theme park (*Taman Mini*) was opened in Jakarta. This park and the activities within it also helped to familiarize park goers with Indonesia's ethnic groups through displays of these ethnic groups housing architecture, customs, and dress (Hoon, 2006). In doing so, the performances in this park started to laminate ethnic stereotypes with other semiotic information helping to form semiotically denser ethnic stereotypes. These stereotypes were further laminated with demeanors from the late 1980s through a rapidly evolving television network (Kitley, 2000; Sen & Hill, 2000). By the late 1990s a series of complex and inter-related political and economic events helped Indonesian ethnic soaps become one of the most popular and widely broadcast television genres in Indonesia (Loven, 2008; Rachmah, 2006). As we will see below, a common feature of these soaps was the use of fragments of regional languages along with enough semiotic information to anchor these fragments to particular regions.

#### **4. Constructing semiotically dense stereotypes: the comedic soap “Si Kabayan”**

The persona of *Si Kabayan* has been circulating on a mass scale in written form and in television and feature length films since the early 1980s. According to a number of Indonesians I interviewed as part of a project on the reception of soaps (Goebel, 2011b, 2012), written stories about Si Kabayan and its link to Sundanese-ness were also part of the centralized school curriculum that was used nationally from the late 1980s. Typically, the stories revolve around the daily life of Kabayan, his friends, love interest, and potential in-laws who all live in West Java, which is stereotypically inhabited by Sundanese speakers. The television rendition that I will look at here is from the series, *Si Kabayan*, which was broadcast nationally by the commercial broadcaster, *SCTV*, in early 1996. The episode I focus upon is titled *Bukan Impianku Bag: 1* (It wasn't my dream: Part 1). What is striking in this



episode and serial is the contrast in Sundanese usage among Kabayan and his peers and Indonesian usage among a stranger, Kabayan and other characters. What I want to do here is show how this usage becomes linked with other signs (e.g. space, topic, gesture, facial expressions, proximity, prosodic patterns) and interactional histories to produce semiotically denser models of Sundanese and of Indonesian speaking strangers.

The first interaction that I look at, Extract 1, occurs after two scenes. The first scene is of a group of children observing the main character, Kabayan, kneeling and practicing what he wants to say to his girlfriend's father. His talk is peppered with Sundanese tokens. The scene then moves to a house and its surrounds where a male, the father in question, has finished exercising to the astonishment of two female onlookers (his spouse and daughter) who are sweeping the yard and drying rice cakes. In representing the visual and spoken elements of these televised models I use a screen shot (frame) to exemplify some of the other semiotic information not included in my transcripts of talk. A new frame is placed to the left of the dialogue where changes in gesture, posture, and facial expression co-occur with a change in participant constellations and/or a new speaker turn. Bold indicates Sundanese, plain font indicates Indonesian and bold italics indicates ambiguous forms, that is, those that could be either Indonesian or Sundanese.

**Extract 1**      *Place, proxemics, localness, and intimacy*



**Abah**

- |   |                             |                                 |
|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 | kenapa <b>ambu</b> .        | What's up <b>Mum</b> ?          |
| 2 | melihatnya sampai           | <b>Gawking</b> at me like that, |
| 3 | <b>melongo</b> begitu (0.5) | as if you were looking at       |
| 4 | kaya? melihat <i>kebo</i> ' | a <i>buffalo</i> .              |



#### Ambu

- 5 he::ran . **abah teh** udah [I] don't understand. **Dad**  
 6 puluhan tahun? tidak [you] haven't done any  
 7 pernah **olahraga** (0.5) **exercise** for years, **why**  
 8 >**naha ayeuna olahraga** **are** [you] **now** taking up  
 9 **deui atuh'**> **exercise again?**

(Talk deleted: Abah explains that what he is doing is Taiso, which the Japanese taught him during the occupation. Abah then notes that Ambu can also do this as well, although it is a dance version, which he parodies).



#### Ambu

- 10 +bo::hong iteung . [He's] fibbing Iteung,  
 11 bohong+ >**si abah mah** [He's] fibbing, it's just  
 12 biasa aja> lah' . **sok aya** like [your] **dad**, [he's]  
 13 **aya waé** **always talking nonsense**

(Source: Petet, 1996)

The first onlooker is referred to with the term *Ambu* (Mother) on line 1, while the other is referred to in the subsequent talk with Iteung (a person's name) on line 10. Although the forms in bold font are not explicitly named as Sundanese, they are potential indexes of ethnicity by way of their being spoken in a setting that also presupposes close interpersonal relations. For example, the physical location of the interaction – which is in the front yard of a house surrounded by gardens – hints at potential family and thus intimate social relations between participants. Such a reading is further supported with recourse to signs of speaker age, where both speakers seem to be of the same age and much older than Iteung (the person in the middle). Together and over the course of the interaction this set of signs start to provide

“indexical focus” (Agha, 2007: 24) that not only frame the interaction as intimate, but also as potentially ethnic because intimacy can presuppose ethnicity.

As their talk continues, we also see Iteung and Ambu move their bodies so that they are standing side-by-side. This closeness also co-occurs with some touching and the mention of a proper name, Iteung, which also presupposes some level of familiarity (i.e. a shared interactional history). They then face each other while laughing and proceed to carry out the highly animated talk in lines 11–13. It is animated in relation to the prior talk because of regular touching between Ambu and Iteung (Frame 3) as Ambu refutes Abah’s parody of her. Ambu also raises her voice (indicated by the “+” signs surrounding the text) and changes her tempo (indicated by “>” signs surrounding the text). The topic of talk, Abah’s decades of physical inactivity (lines 6–10), is about personal life-worlds which also presupposes a history of close interpersonal relations (i.e. to say that someone hasn’t exercised for ten years presupposes that you have known them for ten years). All of these signs continue to provide an indexical focus that point to intimate social relations between participants. The import of this representation is how it adds other signs to the doing of intimate social relations and thus also increases the semiotic density of these models of personhood and the social relations that exist between them.

As the story continues, these interactions and the linguistic signs described thus far begin to be anchored to geographic region, while also sitting in contrast to the represented ways of speaking of other characters. In Extract 2, which represents a stranger’s entrance into a rural setting, we see that his use of other signs are interactionally ‘flat’ when compared with interactions between those who have been represented as intimate. This interaction is preceded by a shot of Kabayan lying down in a field tending his buffalo and then his buffalo returning to Kabayan’s home. At Kabayan’s home, which Diran happens to be passing by, there are two new characters.

**Extract 2      *Personal names and interactional flatness***



**Diran**

- |   |                          |                         |
|---|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | mau cari siapa pak (1.1) | Who are you looking for |
| 2 | barangkali bisa saya     | Sir? Maybe I can help.  |
| 3 | bantu (1.2)              |                         |



**Stranger**

- |    |                              |                             |
|----|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 4  | begini pak (1.4) saya        | It is like this Sir, I came |
| 5  | datang ke mari (0.5)         | here with the purpose of    |
| 6  | maksudnya mau menemui        | meeting and                 |
| 7  | dan membawa saudara          | accompanying Mr.            |
| 8  | kabayan (0.8). tadi:: . kata | Kabayan [to ...]. Earlier   |
| 9  | tukang warung:: .            | the stall owner said his    |
| 10 | >rumahnya di sini> .         | [Kabayan's] house is        |
| 11 | katanya .                    | here.                       |

**Diran**

- |    |                       |                         |
|----|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 12 | iya . betul pak (0.3) | Yes, that is right Sir. |
|----|-----------------------|-------------------------|

**Stranger**

- |    |                    |        |
|----|--------------------|--------|
| 13 | he he he he' (0.5) | Laugh. |
|----|--------------------|--------|



**Diran**

- |    |                     |                       |
|----|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 14 | membawa . >maksud   | To accompany, what do |
| 15 | bapak . kabayan mau | you mean Kabayan will |
| 16 | dibawa ke mana> .   | be brought where?     |

**Stranger**

- |    |                      |                         |
|----|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 17 | o::h . bukan membawa | Oh [I] don't mean bring |
|----|----------------------|-------------------------|

18	(0.5) maksud saya: ? .	[as a prisoner] what I
19	saya hanya ingin	mean is that I only wish
20	menemuinya' (0.6) ada	to meet with him. There
21	masalah penting (1.0)	is an important matter.



**Diran**

22	itu tadi . kerbaunya baru	Earlier his buffalo just
23	saja masuk (0.5) biasanya	came home, usually
24	. kabayan di belakangnya	Kabayan is right behind
25	pak .	him, sir.

(Source: Petet, 1996)

In taking a comparative perspective of the above embodied talk with that represented in Extract 1, there are a number of differences. First of all we see that although the represented space is a house, at least one of the people does not belong to this intimate setting. This is so because Diran's act of asking "who are you looking for" together with his use of the terms for you "Pak" instead of Pak + name presupposes unfamiliar social relations. Second, unfamiliarity with locality is explicitly stated by the stranger on lines 8-11, when he checks whether the person he is looking for lives at the house. In this sense, participants are represented as jointly establishing that they do not share common ground about locale. As the interaction unfolds there is also a notable difference in proximity between speakers. Compare for example the last frame of Ex. 1 with the frames in Ex. 2, which I have reproduced as Figure 1.

**Figure 1**      **Contrasting proxemics and touch**



We also do not see any of the body language (touching and smiling), animated talk (e.g. laughter and changes in volume and tempo), or use of emphatic forms, such as *teh*, *atuh*, and *mah* (lines 5, 9, and 11) found in the earlier interaction represented in Ex. 1. The difference in the use of space, gesture, touch, and facial expressions also co-occurs with patterns of pause that are typically longer than those found in Ex.1. The talk itself is also very much about the material world and whereabouts of one person (Kabayan) and contains no talk that indicates a sharing of common ground (e.g. about locale). Taken together all of these signs help provide an indexical focus that point towards a stranger relationship between these participants.

This stranger relationship is further built upon through the existence of another sign, namely the car number plate (see Figure 2), which helps anchor the interaction to a region, in this case somewhere in West Java, which is stereotypically known as a Sundanese speaking area. More specifically, the “D” on the car number plate in Figure 2 indicates “registered to the Bandung area of West Java”. This number plate helps to solidify the emergent stranger identities through a number of other indexical relationships. On the one hand, it anchors the whole serial to West Java and thus these speakers as potentially of Sundanese ethnicity and by extension through indexical links between place, person and language, Sundanese speakers. Second, and following on from this, co-ethnic speakers stereotypically use ethnic languages if

they are known to each other. That they do not seem to speak in the same way as those in Ex. 1 points to unfamiliar social relations. More generally, while language policy, school curriculum, and so on have helped to create and reproduce indexical relationships between stranger social relations and Indonesian – incidentally the language being used here – the import of this representation is how it adds other signs and information about interactional histories to represented personas. In doing so, this practice increases the semiotic density of these models of personhood and the social relations that exist between them.

**Figure 2**      **Anchoring story to locale**



After the initial talk Diran and the stranger sit down in front of house pictured in Ex. 2 to wait for Kabayan. Diran then introduces himself as Kebayan's good friend, which anchors Diran to the location. The stranger introduces himself and notes that he is a lawyer. This talk further reinforces stranger social relations because the act of introduction oneself makes it clear that they are strangers. As the talk proceeds it becomes clear that they are strangers who do not live in the same locale because the stranger names his place of origin (Bandung, which is a big city rather than a rural village like the one represented here). Their talk also continues



to be similar to their earlier talk, both in form and content and it contrasts with the talk in Extract 3, which occurs after Diran says he will go and look for Kebayan, but then runs to the house represented in Ex. 1. Diran's talk with Iteung and her mother (referred to as Ambu) are represented in Ex.3 and are again characterized by the representational practices found in Ex.1.

**Extract 3**      *Familiars, animated talk, and Sundanese usage*



**Diran**

- |   |   |                                 |
|---|---|---------------------------------|
| 1 | <b>tulung</b> (1.5) <b>tulung</b> (0.6) | <b>Help! Help</b>               |
| 2 | <b>nyi</b> iteung . <b>tulung</b> .     | <b>Miss</b> Iteung. <b>Help</b> |
| 3 | <b>ambu</b> (1.4) <b>tulung</b> (6.7)   | <b>Mrs.</b> <b>Help!</b>        |

**Ambu**

(Running to the front of  
their house where Diran  
has sat down on the bench  
in front of the house)

- |   |                 |             |
|---|-----------------|-------------|
| 4 | ada +apa+ (0.5) | What is up? |
|---|-----------------|-------------|

**Iteung**

- |   |                             |   |
|---|-----------------------------|---|
| 5 | kenapa <b>kang</b> diran? = | What is the matter<br><b>Brother</b> Diran? |
|---|-----------------------------|---|



**Ambu**

- |   |                                     |                              |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 7 | =                                   |                              |
| 8 | <b>eleuh eleuh</b> .+ <b>kunaon</b> | <b>Gee, gee, what is the</b> |
| 9 | <b>kunaon</b> + .                   | <b>matter? What is the</b>   |





- matter?**
- 10 + iteung + ambilkan **aer**
- 11 cepetan = Itueng quick go and fetch some **water**.

### Iteung

- 13 = iya (1.1) Yes.



### Ambu

- 14 **kunaon** pak (1.4) **What is the matter** Sir?

(Source: Petet, 1996)

In taking a comparative perspective of the above embodied talk with that represented in Ex.2, there are a number of distinctive features that contrast with the previous interaction between Diran and the lawyer from Bandung and Diran and these two women. First of all Diran's level of familiarity with locale and those who inhabit this local is presupposed through Diran's knowledge of how to get from Kabayan's house to Itueng's house. This familiarity with locale and those who inhabit it is further solidified through the use of personal names (Iteung and Diran) on lines 2 and 5 respectively. In contrast to Ex. 2 we can also see large differences in distance between speakers and the use of gesture and touch. In the last three frames of the interaction in Ex. 3 (one of which is reproduced in Figure 3) all three participants are spatially close and Ambu frequently touches Iteung and Diran.

**Figure 3**      **Contrasting proxemics and touch**



This use of space, gesture, and touch also co-occurs with changes in prosodic patterns (in this case increased volume on lines 8–10) and emphatic particles (e.g. *eleuh* on line 8). Together all of these signs provide an indexical focus which points towards familiar social relations between these participants.

As with Ex.1 these participants go on to talk about personal life worlds, in this case they are puzzling over why the lawyer from Ex.2 wants to see Kabayan and how this might relate to previous events and interactions at the local level. Again this talk about local history also continues to point to familiar social relations among these participants by way of them sharing common knowledge about events within this locale. This focus on personal life worlds in interactions among Sundanese speaking intimates is very much fore-grounded in the following interaction that occurs after three scenes: 1. Kabayan, Iteung, Diran, and another friend of Kabayan, Armasan, meeting with the lawyer at Kabayan's house; 2. Iteung's mother and father discussing amongst themselves and with Iteung inside a home about Kabayan's suitability to be Iteung's husband given his million dollar inheritance (the inside setting further solidifies intimate social relations among this triad); and 3. Kabayan worrying deeply over needing to leave his village, friends, and animals to organize his inheritance in Bandung). In Ex.4 the scene now cuts to Iteung where she is spatially located back in her yard

at home and making and eating spicy fruit salad with other women who appear to be age mates.

*Extract 4      Age mates talking about personal life worlds*



**Iteung's Friend 1**

- |   |                                      |   |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | <b>ih</b> (0.5) kamu <b>mah mani</b> | Wow you <b>are so happy</b>                 |
| 2 | <b>resep nya nyi</b> (0.4)           | <b>younger sister aren't</b><br><b>you?</b> |

**Iteung**

- |   |                        |                          |
|---|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 3 | <b>resep</b> apa (0.4) | Why am [I] <b>happy?</b> |
|---|------------------------|--------------------------|

**Iteung's Friend 1**

- |    |                                      |   |
|----|--------------------------------------|---|
| 4  | <b>heueuh eta</b> (0.4) > <b>pan</b> | <b>Yeah, that matter right?</b>               |
| 5  | <b>kang kabayan teh</b>              | <b>Older brother</b> Kabayan                  |
| 6  | sebentar lagi> . punya               | will soon own a textile                       |
| 7  | pabrik tekstil? . PAST:I             | factory. Later if you                         |
| 8  | >nanti <b>teh</b> kamu kalo          | marry him, <b>I can imagine</b>               |
| 9  | kawin> . > <b>kacipta</b> tujuh      | [there will be a wedding                      |
| 10 | hari tujuh malam> .                  | ceremony that lasts]                          |
| 11 | + <b>euy</b> + (0.5)                 | seven days and seven<br>nights, <b>right!</b> |

**Iteung's Friend 2**

- |    |                                     |                            |
|----|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 12 | iya yah . >pasti bakal ada          | Yeah, right? There will    |
| 13 | <b>golek</b> asep sunarya> (0.7)    | surely be a <b>puppet</b>  |
| 14 | # <b>ih</b> # (0.4) kamu <b>mah</b> | <b>performance</b> by Asep |
| 15 | beruntung <b>nyi</b> . pilihan      | Sunarya [a famous          |

- 16 kamu TEPAT? (0.5) puppeteer]. **Wow**, you are  
so lucky **younger sister**.  
You made the right  
choice.

#### Iteung's Friend 1

- 17 sebetulnya' . kamu **teh** Actually [to be honest]  
18 milih **kang** kabayan (0.5) why did you choose **older**  
19 +apanya **nyi+** (while **brother** Kabayan,  
20 smiling and raising **younger sister?**  
21 eyebrows) (0.5)

#### Iteung

- 22 emang apanya gitu' (0.6) Why do [you] think?

#### Iteung's Friend 1

- 23 >yang jelas **mah . kang** What is clear is that **older**  
24 kabayan **teh . jaba** **brother** Kabayan **is not**  
25 **bageur .** **just nice and polite,**  
26 **jaba pinteur . jab::a >** **but also smart, and also**  
27 (0.4) eh . **ai** sekarang **teh** ... ah ah now in addition  
28 ditambah lagi? (0.3)



#### Iteung Friend 2

- 29 ditambah apa gitu = What else?

#### Iteung's Friend 1

- 30 +**beunghar+** (0.6) kaya **Rich**, rich.  
31 (0.3)

### Iteung

- 32 y:a >kalo memang Yes if [he] is indeed my  
33 jodoh> . mau bilang destined partner, then  
34 apalagi **atuh** = what can I say, **right**.



### Iteung's friends

- 35 = adu::h . That's great.  
36 (followed by a spoken  
37 version of a whistle)

(Source: Petet, 1996)

As with Ex. 3 and Ex. 1, locale presupposes intimacy insofar as it is in Iteung's neighborhood. That participants seem to know about Iteung's history (lines 1-11), Kabayan's name (line 24), and Kabayan's characteristics (lines 24-31) also presupposes that the two other participants are locals and thus have some degree of shared interactional history. In contrast to talk about the world in Ex. 2, in Ex. 4 the whole conversation is about personal life words – in this case Iteung's love interest, Kabayan, and why she chose him. The discussion about personal life worlds continue well after line 37 when Iteung is asked when she will marry him as well as the dangers of letting him go to the big city before getting married.

Participants also appear to be age-mates, who wear similar clothing to each other (e.g. t-shirts and batik dresses), which are different to Iteung's mother's clothing: this further points to similarities between these three women and thus intimate social relations. While participants do not use personal names, they do use terms of other reference *nyi* "younger sister" (lines 2, 15, and 19) and *kamu* "you" (lines 1, 8, 14, 16, 17), which are also stereotypically linked with intimate personal relations. The social activity of chatting while eating together also points to the existence of intimate social relations amongst these three

women. In short, in this excerpt there are many signs that produce an indexical focus which points toward intimate social relations which are occurring in a Sundanese speaking locale.

Importantly, these social relations, these participants, and the linguistic forms they use are also linked with demeanors through the co-occurrence of other signs. For example, in their talk we also see many of the features found in the embodied talk represented in Ex. 1 and Ex. 3, including changes in the prosodic features of the talk, the frequent use of smiles and body language, and the frequent use of emphatic particles. For example, there are regular changes in tempo of talk (indicated by the “>” surrounding talk) on lines 4–14, 23–26, and 32–34. In addition, there is regular stressing of words (indicated by CAPS) as on lines 7 and 16, together with the raising of volume of talk (indicated by “+” surround talk) on lines 11, 19, and 30. In terms of facial expressions, the three women regularly move between smiles and other facial expressions.

## **5. Conclusion**

Taking inspiration from a rich tradition of scholarship on semiotics, television, multimodality, and common ground, this paper sought to highlight how light ethnic stereotypes in Indonesia can be developed into semiotically denser stereotypes via representations on Indonesian television. In focusing on one comedic soap, I showed how the co-occurrence of signs of locale, proxemics, gesture, facial expressions, topic (e.g. talk about the world versus talk about personal life worlds), activity type, and prosody added semiotic density to existing models of personhood to give characters a demeanor. Just as importantly, this semiotic density of these models of personhood was developed through representations of degrees of common knowledge or lack of it between characters.

Through a comparison of interaction between different participant constellations I was able to show how audio-visual story-telling created two semiotically dense models of

personhood. On the one hand, the co-occurrence of representations of embodied language practices and shared knowledge about other characters interactional histories helped to construct a model of Sundanese-ness that was inhabited by smiling, prosodically animated, and proximally close Sundanese speaking intimates. On the other hand, the co-occurrence of representations of different embodied practices and a lack of common knowledge helped to construct a model of “Strangeness” that was inhabited by unsmiling, prosodically flat, and proximally distant Indonesian speaker.

It is also important to point out that the audio-visual representation examined here is not an isolated case and similar representational practices can be found in many other comedic soaps of the 1990s as well as in more recent material that I have from 2009. Even so, it also needs to be kept in mind that much of *Si Kabayan* was about rural – urban difference. This overlap between rural-urban differences and the construction and repetition of ways of speaking of the ethnic social types discussed here invites further investigation, but I have bracketed this aspect to focus primarily on representations of ethnicity. In doing so, I hope to have contributed to an emergent body of work that looks at the construction and reproduction of stereotypes in audio-visual mediums (Bucholtz, 2011; Bucholtz & Lopez, 2011; Mendoza-Denton, 2011), while adding to a rich body of work looking at print-based mediums (Agha, 2003, 2011; Inoue, 2006; Miller, 2004).

## Notes

1. This paper will be presented at a semiotics workshop convened by the Department of Anthropology, the University of Pennsylvania on the 4<sup>th</sup> December 2013. As with most academic work, I need to start with a round of thanks to all those who facilitated the writing of this paper. I would like to start by thanking Asif Agha for inviting me to present this paper. I was able to analyze much of the data presented here because of a generous grant from the

Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science (Grant No. C20520380). I would also like to thank a team of Indonesian research assistants who have worked with me on this project, including Eni, Riris, Inu, and Puji. I have many colleagues within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science who have facilitated my sabbatical, which has given me the chance to get back to this data. In particular I would like to thank Nick Herriman, Dirk Tomsa, Linda Seymour, Lidia Tanaka, Yangbin Chen, Kaori Okano, and Chris Mackie. Finally, I would also like to thank Ad Backus, Herman Beck, Jan Blommaert, Sjaak Kroon, Max Spotti, Jef Van der Aa, Piia Varis, and the graduate students at Babylon, Tilburg University for providing a welcoming, warm, and stimulating environment to reflect and to write up this article during my sabbatical.

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